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NREL gets \$20M from DOE for solar

Denver Business Journal - by [Cathy Proctor](#)

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The **U.S. Department of Energy** reported Thursday that the **National Renewable Energy Laboratory** in Golden will get \$20 million over five years, for utilizing new materials to produce solar energy.

NREL will use the money to establish an Energy Frontier Research Center. Overall, the DOE will disburse \$377 million in 46 new, multimillion-dollar Energy Frontier Research Centers located at universities, national laboratories, nonprofit organizations and private firms across the nation.

The federal economic stimulus package provided \$277 million of that money, with the remainder coming from DOE's FY 2009 budget.

NREL said in May it had made the list of 46 new centers. Thursday, the DOE confirmed that NREL will receive \$4 million a year for five years for the research. NREL also is involved in six other research centers led by other organizations.

The new research group at NREL's Golden campus, called the Center for Inverse Design and to be led by NREL Research Fellow Alex Zunger, will take a different approach to materials research.

"This Center will embark on daring research that uses quantum theory and high performance computers to design new materials that have desired properties and then use state-of-the-art synthesis to make them in the laboratory," Zunger said in NREL's May announcement. "Deliberate design of material with tailored properties is an inverse approach to traditional accidental discovery."

Zunger said the center's approach would be like playing "Quantum Jeopardy." Given an answer such as "this material has these unique and useful properties," researchers look for the material that fits the description.

"This could usher in a new era of materials science — not only in renewable energy — but in other technology areas where specialized key materials are needed," Zunger said in the

statement.

Researchers from Northwestern University, Oregon State University and the SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory near Stanford University in California will partner with NREL.

Gov. Bill Ritter hailed DOE's announcement of the \$20 million in funding.

"Congratulations to the National Renewable Energy Laboratory for securing another Recovery Act grant that will support growth and advancements in the New Energy Economy," Ritter said in a news release. "NREL is a critical component of Colorado's energy sector and this grant is the latest example of how the state is being recognized for its work to create jobs and advance energy technologies."

U.S. Rep. Ed Perlmutter, D-Colorado, said in a statement, "I am extremely proud of the work being done at NREL as they continue to set the standard for excellence in renewable energy technology in the world. Becoming energy independent and protecting our environment while providing clean and fuel efficient resources is an important issue and essential to the progress of our nation. When NREL benefits, so do the many renewable energy small businesses collaborating with them."

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